

By William Greider

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Tribal Loyalty Is

THE SURVIVORS are scattered now, yet mysteriously the bond among them lives on, like an unseen imprint of tribal loyalty, a chemical seal that marks so many as Kennedy men.

Whatever it was, whatever held people so close to Kennedy, to the Kennedy brothers and to his family, to the idea of another Kennedy campaign, whatever it was, it is still alive.

"I think it hangs on," said John Slegenthaler, one of those men who was close, who, like the rest of them, has trouble defining it. "Maybe if they hadn't died the way they died, maybe we wouldn't feel the way we do. Maybe that made us realize our loss. But I don't think so. I think it was real and I think it's still there."

Fred Dutton, who served under John F. Kennedy but was closer to Robert, is more analytical: "There's a chemistry, a little bit of mystery, an awful lot of animalism."

It has to do, he thinks, with the timbre of their voices, the gait and manner, the emotional vibrations, more than the issues and ideas.

Lawrence F. O'Brien, former postmaster general, former Democratic national chairman, still best known as JFK's congressional lobbyist, searches for an anecdote to explain.

"The informality of it, my God," O'Brien said, thinking back to the Kennedy White House, mindful of the present one. "We sort of all went to the starting line together. I remember the first day we went into the White House, we didn't have any office assignments or anything like that. We sort of went around and where you put your papers down, that was your office. That was the presidency. But, my God, it looks pretty good now."

Now all the Kennedy anecdotes are jumbled together, personal experiences which imperfectly express the essence of two brothers dead, qualities which people see echoed in the third brother, the last Kennedy.

There was the openness of the Oval Office when JFK was President or the shirt-sleeves arguments at the Justice Department thrashing out crisis strategy for Bob Kennedy or the droll, self-deprecating humor of all three, with a bit of an Irish curl aimed at the listener.

"There never was any formal talk or stage talk or JS," said John Nolan, a lawyer who served as RFK's administrative assistant at Justice.

"I think," said Slegenthaler, now publisher of the Nashville Tennessean, "that they had a sense of security, a self-confidence that made it possible for them never to be threatened by any point of view or dissenting opinion."

In any case, the Kennedy sentiment has survived the years, all of the tragedies from Dallas to Chappaquiddick. It exists today as a political given, a reservoir of talent, ideas and goodwill available to Edward M. Kennedy, a commodity beyond measurement.

If the banter were raised again, most of those men would be marching. They await that possibility with the mixed feelings of dread and nostalgia, the same fatalism which is part of that family's mystique.

New and Old Faces

WHAT IS IT worth? Well, plainly, it will be an impediment to the ambitions of Democratic rivals, a feeling that Kennedy men would prefer to

wait, that commitments are impossible until one knows whether there will be another Kennedy campaign.

Or are they passe? Are they merely looking backward toward a lost brilliance when the future belongs to younger people? The old hands ask that question themselves.

Part of the answer is that, yes, there would be new faces in front, energetic young activists and idea men who are not well known now. But if Ted Kennedy is like his brothers—and he is—he would also draw from the circles of friendship and capabilities which first were formed around his two brothers.

When you talk about Kennedy men (and there were no women in the inner circle except, of course, for the sisters and wives), there were really three generations over the last 15 years—those from the White House and Justice and other key posts of the Kennedy administration, a second wave of younger men who were drawn to Sen. Robert F. Kennedy's staff and his fatal presidential campaign of 1968, a third nucleus of talent grouped around Sen. Edward M. Kennedy.

Teddy Kennedy inherits all three. Richard Goodwin, who wrote President Kennedy's "Alliance for Progress" speech, who wrote the first campaign rhetoric for Bobby in 1968, was in harness again for Teddy this summer, drafting the carefully balanced prose for Kennedy's Alabama appearance with George Wallace.

Burke Marshall, now a dean of Yale Law School, once the chief civil rights lawyer for the Kennedy administration, is a close friend and counselor to Teddy. Ted Sorensen, the corporate lawyer who used to provide cadence

Alive and Waiting

for JFK speeches, is frequently consulted. So are Siegenthaler and John Douglas, a Covington & Burling lawyer who headed the civil division at Justice.

Ideas and Experience

BYOND THEM, the circle widens to more casual ties, Fred Dutton, who played strategist and alter ego for RFK in '68; Frank Mankiewicz, who was Bobby's press secretary; Pierre Salinger, who was President Kennedy's press secretary—the senator sees them now and then. Adam Walinsky, who wrote speeches for RFK, rings in with an idea every so often; so does Peter Edelman, Bobby's administrative assistant, now dean of students at the University of Massachusetts.

These few names only suggest the much larger pool of counsel which is available or would be if there were a Kennedy campaign. Some are strictly idea men, some have the kind of gritty experience which only comes from winning a primary.

But the tribal chemistry extends far beyond the close circle. In Washington, dozens of guys walk around wearing the Kennedy crest—the PT-109 tieclasp—who never met either of the dead Kennedys, except perhaps in reception line or a crowded staff meeting. They are, nonetheless, touched by the same sense of loyalty, perhaps more fiercely because it is slightly fake.

A Southern Convert

AND BEYOND them, there are men and women all over the country who worked in one of those campaigns, who also think of themselves as Kennedy people.

"I used to travel a lot with Bob Ken-

nedy and we would meet them everywhere," John Nolan remembered. "They would have a tiepin or their mother would have President Kennedy's picture on the wall. After the assassination, they would always tell you where they were when it happened. You would meet these people and, it's true, they were as much Kennedy people as you were in terms of feelings."

John Siegenthaler, who traveled the South when the Kennedy name meant social upheaval and conflict, remembers another convert:

"There was a U.S. marshal in Georgia. Might have been Alabama. No, it was Georgia. We were trying to get all the U.S. marshals to take on black guys and I used to go around telling them, boys, you got to do it. This fellow I really struggled with. Finally we got him to take somebody. When Bob got killed, this fellow called on the telephone. I think if Ethel had run the next morning, this fellow would have been in there slugging for her."

For Ted Kennedy, the legacy involves another asset—access to ideas. Liberal academics, even if their faces were not familiar in the old circles, still recognize that a Kennedy can bring unique stature to a new idea and that this Kennedy, like his brothers, will at least listen.

"There is an incredible intellectual flow," said Dutton. "Some of it is mushy, some of it is good, but it's a benefit that these other guys don't get."

"Most people appreciate a chance to explain their views," said John Nolan. "Recognition of that simple principle is no small part of the Kennedys' success."

Larry O'Brien remembered another quality in the late President, political courage. O'Brien called it guts—the time JFK faced down the Baptist ministers in Houston, the West Virginia primary where he talked straightout about his Catholicism without apologies.

"I'm Catholic," said O'Brien, "and it represented something to me I never had the capacity to come up to. I think I accepted the mores of the society, the established ways, the way things are. He was a little better, able to face the things of life better than the rest of us."

Uncertain Prospects

WHEN ONE INQUIRES about those days, they respond with a flood of memories. They are grateful for the chance to recall them. Yet the keepers of this flame are not at all sure that it could ever be rekindled for them. More important, they wonder aloud if they would want that. Their muted feelings about the future reflect fear of another Kennedy target, the ache of lost kinship from old campaigns. Nor mal ambitions notwithstanding, nearly all of them are successful now in their own terms, their own men.

"There's nothing older than the guy who came out of the last campaign," said Nolan.

"The truth of it is," said Siegenthaler, "none of us wants to encourage him to do it. Not for us, it's just unfair to him."

And yet it's there. Most of them recognize that. If the bugle sounded, they would report to colors, ready to serve in whatever way they seemed to be needed.

"I don't think any of us really feels he ought to run," said Siegenthaler. "But if he called up and needed help on anything, I think everybody would feel the need to help."

Siegenthaler laughed at himself. "I still have the brand on my ass," he confessed.